

1944

Pius XII and DEMOCRACY



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PIUS XII AND DEMOCRACY

Christmas Message of Pope Pius XII
December 24, 1944

Revised Translation
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FOREWORD

The Pope's Christmas Message of 1944 is one of the greatest documents of our time! This is not the opinion of some few devout Catholics. It is the considered judgment of editors, political writers and statesmen who have studied the Pontiff's statements carefully and critically. These well informed men know that the American people are baffled and disheartened by the absence of any well defined statement of the principles for which our country is fighting. They know that mere slogans and solemn assurances that "all will be well" if we put our trust in the hidden plans of a few men do not suffice any longer. The American people want a clear-cut statement of policy and a definite plan for peace, and in the message of Pius XII they have both.

Every American citizen should study this plan for peace. It is simply stated. The Pope's definition of Democracy goes back to the original definition of the founders of the Republic. His statement of the truth that individuals are and must be the subject, foundation, and end of the social order reminds us that we have rights as well as duties in these perilous times and that one of the most important is the right to be heard.

Every citizen will welcome the Pope's endorsement of an International Organization which will have real and effective authority over member States. And certainly those who have suffered cruelly in this global war will respond instantly to the Pope's plea that they have a firm determination, a "holy obstinacy" to ban once and for all wars of aggression. Shall a nation be allowed to realize national aspirations by waging war? Shall nations solve their disputes with other nations on the field of battle? Not if the people force their leaders to listen to the leader whom David Lawrence calls "one of the greatest statesmen of our times."

Once before leaders brushed aside the advice of a Pope and dismissed his plan as impractical and unreal. This war is the result of their "practical" substitute. They dare not repeat their folly. The people are beginning to appreciate that only a plan based on moral and Gospel principles can save the peace. The Pope's Christmas Message is the answer to their prayers for light and the foundation of their hope for permanent Peace.

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PIUS XII AND DEMOCRACY

The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared
(Epistle to Titus iii. 4).

1. For the sixth time since the opening of this dreadful war, the Christmas liturgy hails the coming of God our Saviour among us with these calm, peaceful words.

2. By its wonderful charm the humble, mean cradle of Bethlehem focusses the attention of all believers. A great flood of light and joy flows deeply and pervasively into the hearts of men who are weighed down by darkness, affliction and depression.

3. Heads that were bowed lift again serenely, for Christmas is the feast of human dignity, the feast of that "wonderful exchange by which the Creator of the human race, taking a living body, deigned to be born of a Virgin, and by His coming bestowed on us His divinity." (First Antiphon of First Vespers for the Feast of the Circumcision.)

4. But our gaze turns quickly from the Babe of the crib to the world around us, and the sorrowful sigh of John the Evangelist comes to our lips: "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John i. 5).

5. Alas! For the sixth time the Christmas dawn breaks again on ever widening battlefields, on graveyards where war victims lie buried in steadily lengthening rows, on devastated lands where a few tottering towers tell with silent pathos the story of once flourishing and prosperous cities whose bells have fallen to the ground, or have been carried off, and no longer awaken the people with their jubilant Christmas chimes.

6. These silent witnesses denounce this blot on the story of man. Deliberately blind to the brilliance of Him Who is the splendor and light of the Father, wilfully straying from Christ, man has fallen into chaos and into the denial of his own dignity.

7. Even the little lamp is quenched in many majestic temples and in many modest chapels, where before the tabernacle it had shared the watches of the Divine Guest over a world asleep. What desolation! What contrast! Can there still be hope for mankind?

Grounds of Hope

8. Blessed be the Lord! Out of the mournful groans of sorrow, up from the very depths of the heart-rending anguish of oppressed individuals and countries there arises an aura of hope. To an ever increasing number of noble souls there comes the thought, and with it a clearer, stronger determination to make this universal upheaval a starting point for a new era of far-reaching renovation—the complete reorganization of the world.

9. Thus, while armed forces continue to engage in murderous battles with increasingly deadly weapons, statesmen and responsible leaders of nations, come together for talks and conferences to determine the fundamental rights and duties on which a community of states should be built, and to blaze the trail toward a better future—one more secure and more worthy of mankind.

10. A strange paradox this: a war whose bitterness bids fair to reach the limits of paroxysm, and a notable progress in aspirations and proposals for a solid and lasting peace! While one may well discuss the worth, the feasibility, the efficacy of various proposals, and suspend judgment about them it is for all that plainly true and evident that this movement has begun.

People Are Awake

11. Moreover—this is perhaps the most important point—beneath the sinister lightning of the war that encompasses them, in the blazing heat of the furnace that imprisons them, the peoples have awakened as it were from a heavy sleep. They have taken a new attitude toward the State and toward those who govern—they ask questions, they criticize, and they distrust.

12. Taught by bitter experience, they are more aggressive in opposing the concentration of power in dictatorships that cannot be censured or touched, and in calling for a system of government more in keeping with the dignity and liberty of the citizens. These uneasy multitudes, stirred by the war to their innermost depths, are today firmly convinced—at first perhaps in a vague and confused way but already unyieldingly—that had there been the possibility of censuring and correcting the actions of public authority, the world would not have been dragged into the vortex of a disastrous war, and that to avoid the repetition of such a catastrophe in the future we must vest efficient guarantees in the people themselves.

13. In this psychological atmosphere, is it any wonder that the tendency toward democracy is capturing the peoples and winning a large measure of approval and support from men who hope to play a more efficient part in the destinies of individuals and of society?

14. It is hardly necessary to recall the teaching of the Church, that "it is not forbidden to prefer temperate, popular forms of government, without prejudice, however, to Catholic teaching on the origin and use of authority," and that "the Church does not disapprove of any of the various forms of government, provided they be by themselves capable of securing the good of the citizens" (Leo XIII, Encyclical "Libertas," June 20, 1888).

15. On this feast day which commemorates both the benignity of the Incarnate Word and the dignity of man, as a

person and as a member of society, we direct attention to the problem of democracy. Our aim is to examine the norms by which it should be directed if it is to be a true and healthy democracy—one that answers the needs of the hour. This action shows clearly that the Church is interested and solicitous, not so much about the external structure and organization of a democracy—matters which depend on the particular aspirations of each people—as with its individual citizens. Instead of being the object, merely passive elements, as it were, in the social order, they are in fact, and must continue to be its subject, its foundation, and its end.

16. Taking it for granted that democracy, in the broad sense, admits of various forms, and can be realized in monarchies as well as in republics, two questions come up for consideration: First, what characteristics should distinguish the men who live in a democracy and under a democratic regime? Second, what characteristics should distinguish the men who hold the reins of government in a democracy?

What a Healthy Democracy Means

17. Two rights which democracies guarantee to their citizens, as the very term democracy implies, are that they shall have full freedom to set forth their own views of the duties and sacrifices imposed upon them, and that they will not be compelled to obey without being heard.

18. From the solidarity, harmony and good results produced by this understanding between the citizens and the Government one may decide when a democracy is really healthy and well balanced, and what is its life energy and power of expansion.

19. Considering the extent and nature of the sacrifices demanded of all citizens, especially in our day when the activity of the State is so vast and decisive, the democratic form of government appears to many a postulate of nature imposed by reason itself.

20. When, however, people call for "democracy and better democracy," that demand can have no other meaning than that citizens shall be increasingly placed in a position to hold their own opinions, to voice them, and to make them effective in promoting their general welfare.

A True vs. a Spurious Democracy

21. Hence follows a first conclusion with its practical consequence. The State is not a distinct entity which mechanically gathers together a shapeless mass of individuals and confines them within a specified territory.

22. It is and should be in practice the organic and organizing unity of a real people. The people and a shapeless multitude (or as it is called "the masses") are two distinct concepts.

23. The people lives and moves by its own life energy; the masses are inert of themselves and can only be moved from outside. The people lives by the fullness of life in the men that compose it, each of whom—in his proper place and in his own way—is a person conscious of his own responsibility and of his own views.

24. The masses, on the contrary, waiting for the impulse from outside, become an easy plaything in the hands of anyone who seeks to exploit their instincts and impressions. They are ready to follow, in turn, today this flag, tomorrow another.

25. From the exuberant life of a true people, an abundant, rich life is diffused in the state and in all its institutions. With a constantly self-renewing vigor, it instills into the citizens the consciousness of their own responsibility, and a true instinct for the common good.

26. By deft management and employment the State can also utilize the elementary power of the masses. In the ambitious hands of one or of many who have been artificially brought together for selfish aims, the "masses" who have been reduced to the minimum status of a mere machine can be used by the state to impose its whims on the better part of the real

people. Thus the common welfare is injured seriously and for a long while, and the injury is very often hard to heal.

27. Hence follows clearly another conclusion: the masses—as we have just defined them—are the capital enemy of true democracy and of its ideal of liberty and equality.

28. In a people worthy of the name the citizen feels within him the consciousness of his personality, of his duties and rights and of his own freedom along with the freedom and dignity of others.

29. In a people worthy of the name those inequalities which are not based on whims but on the nature of things—inequalities of culture, possessions, social standing—so long as they are not prejudicial to justice and mutual charity, do not constitute any obstacle to the existence and the prevalence of a true spirit of union and brotherhood.

30. On the contrary, so far are they from impairing civil equality in any way, that they show its true meaning, namely, that, in the eyes of the State, everyone has the right to live his own personal life honorably in the place and under the conditions in which the designs and dispositions of Providence have placed him.

31. In contrast with this picture of the democratic ideal of liberty and equality in a people's government conducted by honest and farseeing men, what a spectacle is that of a democratic State left to the whims of the Masses!

32. Liberty, which is really a moral duty of the individual, becomes a tyrannous claim of freedom to give free rein to one's impulses and appetites at whatever cost or detriment to others.

33. Equality degenerates to a mechanical level, and becomes a colorless uniformity in which the sense of true honor, of personal activity, of respect for tradition, of dignity—in a word, of all that gives life its worth—gradually fades away and disappears.

34. The only survivors are, on one hand, the victims deluded by a specious mirage, naively taken for the genuine

spirit of democracy with its liberty and equality; and on the other the more or less numerous exploiters who have known how to use the power of money and of organization to secure a privileged position, and have gained power.

Democracies Must Have Authority

35. Like any other form of government the democratic state, whether monarchical or republican, must have the power to command, with a real and effective authority.

36. The divinely established absolute order of beings and purposes which makes each man an independent personality, the source and end of his own social life, by imposing on him imperative duties and by bestowing on him inviolable rights, calls also for the existence of the State as a necessary society, and gives it authority, without which it could neither exist nor live.

37. If men in using their personal liberty, were to deny all dependence on a superior authority possessed of coercive power, they would by this very fact cut the ground from under their own dignity and liberty, for they would be violating the divinely ordained absolute order of beings and purposes.

38. Since they are established on this one identical foundation the person, the State and the Government, with their respective rights, are so united that they stand or fall together. And since that absolute order, as right reason and particularly our Christian faith testify, cannot have any other origin than a personal God, our Creator, it follows that the dignity of man is the dignity conferred by God on the moral community, and the dignity of political authority is the dignity it enjoys through its participation in the authority of God.

39. No form of State can avoid taking cognizance of this intimate and indissoluble connection between itself and the divine order—least of all a democracy. If those in power do not see it, or discount it in any degree, their own authority is shaken. Moreover, social morality and the specious appear-

ance of a purely formal democracy may often be a cloak for what is in reality least democratic.

40. Only a clear appreciation of the purposes assigned by God to every human society, joined to a deep sense of the exalted duties of social activity, can put those who have power in a position to fulfill their own obligations in the legislative, judicial and executive order with that objectivity, impartiality, loyalty, generosity and integrity without which a democratic government would find it hard to command the respect and the support of the better section of the people.

41. A deep sense of the principles underlying a political and social order that is sound and that conforms to the norms of right and justice is of special importance to those who have the power to legislate, in whole or in part, as the people's delegates in any kind of democratic regime.

42. And since the center of gravity, in a normally set up democracy, is in this popular assembly from which political currents radiate into every field of public life—for good or ill—the question of the high moral standards, practical ability and intellectual capacity of their parliamentary representatives is for every people living under a democratic regime a question of life or death, of prosperity or decadence, of soundness or perpetual unrest.

43. To secure effective action, to win esteem and trust, every legislative body—as experience shows beyond doubt—should have within it a group of select men who are spiritually eminent and of strong character. These men will look on themselves as the representatives of the entire people and not as the mandatories of a mob, whose interests are often unfortunately preferred to what is really required for the general welfare. This group should not be confined to any one profession or social class but should reflect every phase of the people's life. They should be chosen because of their solidly Christian convictions, their straight and steady judgment, and their grasp of what is practical as well as equitable. True to themselves in all circumstances, they should have clear and

sound principles, healthy and definite policies. Above all, they should have that authority which springs from unblemished consciences and inspires confidence, an authority which will make them capable of leadership and guidance, particularly in crises which unduly excite the people and make it likely that they will be led astray and lose their way. Those periods of transition are generally stormy and turbulent, agitated by passion, by divergent opinions, and by conflicting programs. A thousand fevers consume the people and the State. In those crucial days legislators should feel doubly obliged to infuse into them the spiritual antidote of clear views, kindly interest, impartial and sympathetic justice, and devotion to national unity and concord in a sincere spirit of brotherhood.

44. People whose spiritual and moral temperament is sufficiently sound and fecund find that remedy themselves. They are able to produce the heralds and agencies of democracy for they live in those dispositions and know how to put them into practice effectively.

45. But where such men are lacking, others come to take their places to make politics serve their ambition, and to be a quick road to profit for themselves, their caste and their class. The pursuit of their private interests makes them completely lose sight of the general welfare and throw it into jeopardy.

State Authority Subordinate, Not Supreme

46. A sound democracy, based on the immutable principles of the natural law and revealed truth, will resolutely turn its back on such corruption as gives to the State Legislature an unchecked and unlimited power, and moreover, makes the democratic regime, purely and simply a form of absolutism, notwithstanding its contrary outward appearance.

47. State absolutism, which is not to be confused, as such, with an absolute monarchy, which is not now under discussion, consists in fact in the false principle that the authority of the State is unlimited and that even when it gives free rein to despotic aims, and goes beyond the confines between good and

evil, there is no right of appeal against it to a higher law which binds in conscience.

48. One who is imbued with right concepts of the State, of authority and of his power as a guardian of social order will never think of derogating from the majesty of the positive law within the ambit of its natural competence. The dignity of positive law, however, is inviolable only when it is in agreement with the absolute order set up by the Creator, or at any rate does not oppose that order as set forth in a new light by the Gospel revelation.

49. Positive law can subsist only in so far as it respects the foundations on which human personality rests, as well as the State and the Government. This is the fundamental criterion for determining the health of all forms of government—democracies included. It is the criterion by which the moral value of every particular law should be judged.

Sane Democracies Can Solve International Problems

50. We are anxious, beloved sons and daughters, to take the occasion of Christmastide to point out along what lines a democracy befitting human dignity can secure happy results in harmony with the law of nature and with the designs of God as manifested in Revelation. Indeed we are deeply convinced of the supreme importance of this problem for the peaceful progress of mankind.

51. We also realize the exalted claims that this form of government makes on the moral maturity of the individual citizen. That maturity he can never hope to attain fully and securely if the light from the cave of Bethlehem does not illumine the dark path along which the peoples are going forward through the stormy present toward a future which they hope will be more serene.

52. How far will the representatives and pioneers of democracy be inspired in their deliberations by the conviction that the absolute order of beings and purposes, of which we

have repeatedly spoken, comprises also, as a moral necessity and the crown of social development, the unity of mankind and of the family of peoples?

53. On the recognition of this principle hangs the future peace of the world. No world reform, no peace guarantee can abstract from it without being weakened and without being untrue to itself.

54. If, on the other hand, this same moral necessity were to find its realization in a society of peoples who have succeeded in eliminating the structural defects and shortcomings of former systems, then the majesty of that order would regulate and inspire equally the deliberations of that society and the use of its instruments of sanction.

55. For this reason, too, one understands why the authority of such a society must be real and effective over the member States, in such wise, however, that each of them retains an equal right to its own sovereignty. Only thus will the spirit of sane democracy be able to pervade the vast and thorny ground of foreign relations.

Wars of Aggression Must Be Banned

56. There lies on all States and peoples, moreover, the duty of doing everything to ban wars of aggression, once and for all time, as legitimate solutions of international disputes and as a means of realizing national aspirations. That duty brooks no delay, no procrastination, no hesitation, no subterfuge.

57. Many attempts in this direction have been seen in the past. They all failed. And they will all fail always, until the saner section of mankind has the firm determination, the holy obstinacy, like an obligation in conscience, to fulfill this mission which past ages have not undertaken with sufficient gravity and resolution.

58. If a generation has ever had to appreciate in the depths of its conscience the call: "War on war," it is certainly the present generation.

59. It has passed through an ocean of blood and tears wider and deeper than mankind had ever before encountered. It has lived through indescribable atrocities so intensely that the recollection of their horrors must remain stamped in its memory and even in the deepest recesses of its soul as the picture of a hell against which anyone who cherishes a sense of humanity desires more than anything else to close the door forever.

Necessity of a Supra-National Organization

60. From the decisions already published by international commissions one may draw the conclusion that an essential point in any future international arrangement will be the formation of an organization for the maintenance of peace. This organization will be vested by common consent with supreme authority and with power to smother in its germinal stage any threat of isolated or collective aggression.

61. No one can hail this development with greater joy than he who has long upheld the principle that the idea of war as an apt and proportionate means of solving international conflicts is now out of date.

Hope of Mankind

62. No one can wish success to this undertaking which is now being worked out more seriously and purposefully than ever before, with greater enthusiasm than he who has conscientiously striven to make the Christian and religious mentality reject modern war, with its monstrous means of conducting hostilities.

63. Unquestionably the progress of man's inventions, which should have heralded the realization of greater well being for all mankind, has been employed instead to destroy all that had been built up through the ages.

64. By that very fact the immorality of wars of aggression has been patently demonstrated. If there is now added to this recognition of their immorality the threat that other nations

will intervene judicially and inflict chastisement on aggressors, then war will always be subject to the stigma of proscription, will be under surveillance, and will lie open to prevention by force. Thus mankind, emerging from the dark night in which it has been so long submerged will be able to hail the dawn of a new and better era of history.

Rights of All Nations Must Be Protected

65. All this, however, rests on one condition. The peace settlement which is to be strengthened and stabilized by mutual guarantees and, whenever necessary, by economic sanctions and even by armed intervention, must not give definite countenance to any injustice. It must not imply the derogation of a single right of any nation, to that nation's detriment, whether it be victor, vanquished, or neutral. It must not impose a perpetual, but only a temporary burden on any nation in reparation of war damage.

66. That a people, to whose government—or perhaps even partially to themselves—the responsibility for the war is attributed, should have to undergo for a time the rigors of security measures until the violently broken bonds of mutual trust are gradually welded together again, is quite understandable from a human point of view, and in all probability will be inevitable in practice.

67. Nevertheless even these peoples must have a well-founded hope—commensurate with their effective collaboration in the work of reconstruction—of being able to regain association with other states in the great community of nations, on a basis of equality and of identical rights.

68. To deny them that hope would be the reverse of far-sighted wisdom. It would be to assume the grave responsibility of barring the way to a general liberation of mankind from all the disastrous material, moral and political consequences of the gigantic cataclysm which has shaken the poor human family to its very foundations, but at the same time, has shown it the road to new goals.

Recognizing the Solidarity of the Human Race

69. We will not renounce our confidence that the peoples, who have all passed through the school of suffering, will be able to remember the stern lessons they have learned.

70. In this hope we are strengthened by the words of many men who have had a great share in the sufferings of the war. While insistent on their own need of security against any future aggression, they have generously expressed respect for the vital rights of other peoples and their aversion to any usurpation of those rights.

71. It would be vain, however, to think that their sage judgment, dictated by the experience of history and by a high political sense will be generally accepted by public opinion, or even by the majority of men while their spirits are still burning white-hot.

72. Hatred and the impossibility of mutual understanding between peoples who have fought against each other have given rise to a mist too dense to let us hope that the hour has already come when there will be light to see clearly the tragic panorama on either side.

73. But one thing we know. The moment will come, perhaps sooner than people think, when both sides will realize that, all things considered, there is only one way of getting out of the meshes in which war and hate have wrapped the world—the genuine recognition of human solidarity, a truth too long forgotten. This solidarity is not partial—limited to some peoples, but universal—embracing all. It is founded on the intimate connection of their mutual and equal destinies and rights.

Wholesale Punishment Unjustifiable

74. Certainly no one thinks of disarming justice in its dealings with those who have exploited the war situation in order to commit real and proved crimes against the common law. For them supposed military necessity could at most have offered a pretext, but never a justification.

75. But if Justice should presume to judge and punish not merely individuals but even whole communities, who could fail to see in such a procedure a violation of the norms which guide every human trial?

States Must Be Guided By Moral and Gospel Principles

76. At this time when peoples find themselves confronted with duties such as they may never have met before in the course of their history, they feel deeply in their tortured hearts the impatient and almost instinctive desire to take the reins of destiny in their own hands with more independence than heretofore. Thus they hope to find it easier to defend themselves from periodic invasions of violence which, like boiling lava torrents, spare nothing that they hold sacred and dear.

77. Thank God, one may believe the time has passed when the claim that moral and gospel principles should guide the life of States and peoples was disdainfully thrust aside as unreal.

78. The events of these war years have amply confuted the scorners of those principles in a harder way than one could ever have imagined.

79. Their disdain for these alleged unrealities has resulted in these stark realities: brutality, iniquity, destruction, annihilation.

80. If the future is to belong to democracy, an essential part in that achievement will have to be given to the religion of Christ and to the Church. She is the mouthpiece of our Redeemer and the institution which carries on His mission of saving men. She teaches and defends supernatural truths and communicates to men the supernatural helps of grace in order to actuate the divinely established order of beings and ends which is the ultimate foundation and directive norm of every democracy.

81. By her very existence the Church rises before the world as a shining beacon to remind it constantly of that divine order.

Her history reflects clearly her providential mission. The struggles, forced on her by abuse of power, which she has had to sustain in defense of the liberty given her by God, were at the same time struggles for man's true liberty.

82. The Church has the mission to announce to the world, which is looking for better and more perfect forms of democracy, the highest and most needed message: the dignity of man, the call to be sons of God. It is the powerful cry, which resounds from the manger of Bethlehem to the furthest confines of the earth at a time when that dignity is tragically low.

83. The holy story of Christmas proclaims this inviolable dignity of man with a vigor and authority that cannot be gainsaid—an authority and vigor that infinitely transcends all that could be achieved by all other possible declarations of the rights of man.

84. Christmas, the great feast of the Son of God Who appeared in human flesh, the feast in which Heaven stoops down to earth with ineffable grace and benevolence, is also the day on which Christianity and mankind contemplating before the Crib the "goodness and kindness of God our Saviour" should become more deeply conscious of the intimate unity that God has established between men.

85. The birth of the Saviour of the world, the Restorer of human dignity in all its fullness, is the moment characterized by the alliance of all men of good will.

86. In Him, love will be restored to the poor world torn by discord, divided by selfishness, and poisoned by hate. In Him, the world will learn to march forward in cordial harmony toward the common goal, and in His peace it will find at last the cure of all its wounds.

Light in Darkness—Christian Charity

87. We do not want to close this Christmas message without addressing a word of heartfelt gratitude to all those States, governments, bishops and peoples who have lent us valiant aid in these days of untold misfortunes, and have enabled us not

only to hearken to the cry of suffering which reaches us from many parts of the world, but also to give a helping hand to many of our beloved sons and daughters whom the misfortunes of war have reduced to extreme poverty and misery.

88. In the first place it is but just to record the immense relief work done by the United States of America in spite of extraordinary transport difficulties, and by His Excellency, the personal representative of the President of that country, for Italy in particular.

89. It is a pleasure for us to express also equal praise and gratitude for the generosity of the head of the State, the Government and the people of Spain, and to the Governments of Ireland, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Peru, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia and Uruguay who have vied with one another in a noble rivalry of brotherly love and charity, whose echo will resound through the world—and not in vain.

90. While men of good will are endeavoring to bridge the gulf and bring the peoples together, this purely disinterested act of charity assumes an aspect and a value of unique importance.

91. When—as we all wish—the dissonance of hate and discord that dominates the present moment will be but a tragic memory, the good effects of this victory of active and magnanimous charity over the poison of selfishness and enmity will ripen into an even larger harvest of good.

92. May all who have had a share in this crusade of charity receive our apostolic blessing as an incentive and a token of gratitude, and with it the assurance that on this feast of love there rises to Heaven for them from numberless anguished hearts, whose anguish does not make them forgetful, this grateful prayer: "Deign to reward with eternal life, O Lord, all those who do good to us for Your name's sake."

DISCUSSION CLUB OUTLINE

LESSON I

(Paragraphs 1-10)

*The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared
(Epistle of St. Paul to Titus III. 4)*

For the sixth time since this horrible war began, the Christmas liturgy speaks to us of the coming of the Prince of Peace. Christmas is the feast of human dignity. For "by a wonderful exchange, the Creator taking a human body, deigned to be born of a Virgin and by His coming bestowed on us His divinity."

When we look from the Babe in the crib to the world around us, the sad words of St. John strike into our hearts: "The Light shone in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it" (St. John I. 5). For the sixth time the Christmas dawn breaks on a world plunged into global war, with death and destruction reigning everywhere.

This war is a blot on the story of mankind who blind to the Light of God the Father, deliberately rejecting His Christ, has fallen into chaos and the denial of its own dignity. Even the little light of the sanctuary is out in many places, where it had kept the watches of the night with its Divine Guest while the world slept. Is there then any hope for mankind?

Yes there is. Out of the blood and suffering of individuals and nations there comes a ray of hope. For an ever-increasing number of men of good will are strong in the determination to build this shattered world anew. While the battle rages with murderous fury, leaders of nations are meeting and planning a foundation for a community of nations that will agree to respect the rights of all and agree on the duties of all. They are blazing a trail for a better future more worthy of mankind.

It is a strange paradox that in the midst of devastating war, men's minds are fixed upon proposals leading to a solid and lasting peace. However we may disagree about this proposal or that, the fact remains that the process of formulating a genuine peace plan has begun.

Questions

What is the message of Christmas?

Why is Christmas the feast of human dignity?

"The Light shone in darkness." How does this truth apply today?

This war is a blot on the story of mankind. Why?

What are signs of hope amidst the horror of war?

What encouragement comes from plans for peace about which many disagree?

LESSON II

(Paragraphs 11-27)

The most important thing that has happened out of the welter of war is the awakening of the people. There is a new attitude toward the State and toward Government. It is the attitude of criticism, questioning, distrust.

Bitter experience has taught them to reject any form of dictatorship that places itself beyond the censure of the people. They are demanding a system of government more in keeping with the dignity and liberty of the citizens. They are conscious of the fact that had governments been nearer the people, and more under the control of the people, this disastrous war would not have happened. The people nowhere wanted war. And they are determined to prevent a repetition of this catastrophe. And to do this an efficient guarantee must be vested in the people.

That is the explanation of the trend toward democracy evident among all the peoples of the world. It has the sympathy of the Church, as Leo XIII stated in his day: "It is not forbidden to prefer temperate, popular forms of government that accord with Catholic teaching on the origin and use of authority. . . . The Church does not disapprove of any form of government provided it is capable of securing the good of the citizens" (*HUMAN LIBERTY*, Encyclical, 1883).

It is fitting then that on this Feast which not only commemorates the benignity of the Incarnate Word, but also the dignity of man, that we should discuss the problem of democracy. And we mean TRUE DEMOCRACY. We must examine the form that democracy takes to find out if it is true. Whatever form the individual people chooses, whatever the external structure of the State, it is a true democracy if the INDIVIDUAL MAN far from being a passive element in the social order, is in fact its subject, its foundation and its end.

Admitting that democracy may take either the monarchical or the republican form, we must determine what characteristics should distinguish the citizens and the rulers of a democracy.

Two rights belong to the citizen of a democracy, the right to express his own views on the duties and sacrifices imposed upon him, and the right of not being compelled to obey before first being heard in regard to the command. From the harmony existing between citizens and government as a result of the practical acknowledgement of these two rights, we have a proof of true democracy.

The democratic form of government is the need of our day, because of the extent of the sacrifices demanded of all citizens by Government, and because the activity of the modern State is so vast and decisive. In a true democracy the citizen must have the right to hold his own personal opinion, to express it freely and to urge its adoption for the common good.

From this it follows that the State does not contain within itself and does not bring together in a group a shapeless mass of individuals. The State is an organic and organizing unity of real people. The people and

a shapeless multitude called the "masses" are two distinct things. The people lives and moves by its own life energy. The masses are inert and can only be moved from the outside. The people lives by the fullness of life in the men that compose it. Each person is conscious of his own views and his own responsibility. The masses on the contrary wait for the impulse from the outside. They are an easy plaything for any exploiter, ready to follow one flag today, another tomorrow.

The life of a true people flows into the life of the State. Entering into every part of the State with ever renewing vigor, it energizes the State with a sense of responsibility for the common good.

The State likewise can use the elementary power of the masses. In one man's hands or in the hands of a group bent only on selfish aims, the masses easily become a machine imposing its whims on the better part of the real people. And so the common good is injured and the injury is often hard to heal.

There follows from this an important fact; the masses are the enemy of true democracy and of its ideal of liberty and equality. In a real people the citizen realizes his own personality, his rights and duties and his freedom. At the same time he has respect for the freedom and dignity of others.

Questions

- What does the Pope say of the awakened attitude of the people?
- What types of government are the people now demanding and why?
- What is the attitude of the Church toward the democratic trend?
- How does the Pope explain true democracy?
- Is it dependent on some special form of government?
- State the two rights belonging to the citizen of a true democracy.
- Why is the democratic form of government the need of today?
- Is the State a shapeless mass of individuals?
- What is the difference between the people and the masses?
- Why are the masses easily exploited?
- How does the life of the people affect the State?
- What happens when the State makes use of the elementary power of the masses?
- How are the masses related to true democracy?
- What is the citizen's attitude in a true democracy?

LESSON III (Paragraphs 28-33)

In a real people inequalities based on the nature of things and not on whim do not hinder a true spirit of union and brotherhood. On the contrary they give meaning to civil equality. For each individual has

the right to live his own personal life before the State, in whatever position Providence has placed him.

Against this picture of the true democratic ideal carried out by a people's Government what a contrast is presented by a so-called democracy ruled by the whims of the masses. Liberty then degenerates into tyranny allowing free reign to a man's passions to the harm of others. Equality then becomes a leveling down process in which honor, tradition and dignity—in fact all that gives life its worth—disappear. The result is the survival of only two classes, the masses debased by the slogans of democracy, and the exploiters who skilled in the use of money and organization, govern them just as they please.

Questions

- How do inequalities affect the life of a real people?
- Explain the difference between the rule of a true people and that of the masses.

LESSON IV (Paragraphs 34-51)

The democratic State like any other form of government should possess real authority. A State without authority cannot exist. If men were to deny the State authority they would destroy their own dignity and liberty, for they would violate the absolute order of beings and purposes.

The individual person, the State, the Government with their respective rights, rest on the foundation of this absolute order of beings and purposes. They are so bound together that they stand or fall together. As this absolute order has God our Creator for its origin, it follows that the dignity of man includes his social dignity. It is the dignity of the moral community willed by God.

No form of State can ignore this truth, least of all a democracy. If rulers fail to acknowledge this, their own authority is shaken. And even though the name and appearance of democracy remain, the people live under a government that is the direct opposite of true democracy.

Only when rulers appreciate the purpose assigned by God to every human society can they fulfill their obligations with integrity, in the executive, legislative and judicial departments of the State. Only then can they expect the support of the real people in the community.

It is important for those who as delegates of the people, hold legislative office in a democracy to know the principles that underlie a just political and social order. The legislative body is the center of gravity in a democracy. From it radiate all political current reaching the people. How necessary then that legislators in a democracy be men of ability and character. Indeed it is a matter of life or death for a democratic State to have capable and worthy legislators.

The members of the legislative body in a democracy should be men

keenly alive to the fact that they represent the *entire* people, and not any one class whose interests often prevail over the welfare of the people. These legislators should be drawn from every class in the population. They should be men of sound Christian principles; their characters should be above reproach; they should be true leaders of the people especially in these times when the people are so likely to go astray. In this period of transition when divergent plans and opposing programs are cropping up everywhere, they should have clear views in presenting their definite plans for national unity.

Peoples who are morally and spiritually prepared can develop leaders of this caliber, in a democracy. But when this is not the case, then false leaders come along who make politics serve their ambition, profiteering for themselves, their caste and class, and ruining the common good.

A true democracy built on the Natural Law and Divine Revelation will not allow its legislative body unlimited power. For this would be State absolutism under the mask of democracy. Such absolutism is built on the false principle that the authority of the State is unlimited, and that there is no appeal to the Higher Law binding every human conscience.

A leader with correct ideas on the State and authority, will wield authority under positive law and not beyond it. For he is the guardian of the social order. And the majesty of this positive law binding the leader as well as the follower, the ruler as well as the ruled, is invisible only when it conforms to the absolute order set up by the Creator and made clear by the Gospel teachings.

Law cannot live unless it respects the foundations on which human personality rests. Neither can the State, nor the Government without this respect for the human personality. This is the test of every healthy form of government. This is the test of the moral value of every particular law.

We are anxious to point out the lines along which democracy can be successful. For the peaceful progress of mankind depends on the correct working out of democracy. But we are also aware of the demands this form of government makes on the moral fiber of the citizens. Only the light of the Star of Bethlehem can make this moral fiber strong enough to carry the people forward through the stormy present to a more peaceful future.

Questions

Why must the State enjoy real authority?

God has established an order for human living. What does the Pope call this?

From what is the dignity of man derived? From what the dignity of authority?

What follows when a democracy ignores the truth of God's order?

What must the rulers of peoples always appreciate?

The legislative body is the center of gravity in a democracy.
Explain.

What type of legislators must a democracy have?

Do the legislators represent classes of the people?

From what classes among the people should the legislators come?

How do false leaders develop in a democracy?

How does the false leader act?

Should the legislative body in a democracy have unlimited power?

How does a true leader rule?

What must positive law be in agreement with?

What is the test of every form of government, and of every law?

What does the peaceful progress of mankind today depend upon?

What is needed to strengthen the moral fiber of the people?

LESSON V

(Paragraphs 52-68)

The UNITY of mankind and of the family of peoples is the truth that the leaders of democracy must keep before their minds in all their deliberations. For this truth is included in the absolute order of beings and purposes established by God, and so often referred to by us. Future peace hangs on the recognition of the fact that mankind is one. No plan of a better world can ignore this and be true to itself.

If a society of peoples recognises the oneness of the human family, and corrects the errors of former associations of peoples, this great truth will be the guiding motive of the society. And when sanctions are to be imposed the same motive will dominate the decisions of the society. This truth will make the authority of the society real and effective over the States that form the society, while each State retains an equal right to its own sovereignty.

There is an immediate duty imposed on all. It is to ban-once and for all, all wars of aggression as the means of solving international disputes and realizing national aims. Many attempts have been made to do this in the past. All have failed. And they will always fail unless the sinner portion of mankind determines to avoid the mistakes of the past, and safeguard the future by formulating a peace-plan that is effective and real. This should be a matter of conscience with all men of good will the world over. This generation above all others should realize the need of banishing war as a means of settling international disputes or vindicating national honor. For this generation more than any other in history has known war for what it is, a welter of blood and agony and destruction. Anyone with a sense of humanity during this day of

horror must be eager to shut the door forever against the recurrence of this hell upon earth.

One fact stands out from the deliberations of various international bodies on the means of preserving peace. It is that a world organization must be founded invested with supreme power by the common consent of all the nations of the world. That power should be able to act at once in crushing any threat of collective or individual aggression. No one welcomes such a plan more heartily than We do, for no one has contended longer than We have, that the idea of war is out of date as a means of settling international disputes.

No one will welcome a really effective world organization for maintaining peace more than We who have constantly striven to make the Christian and religious mentality reject modern war with its monstrous means of carrying on hostilities.

The progress of man's inventions which should have proved a benefit to mankind, has been turned to the destruction of all that has been built up through the ages. But this very fact brings out into clearer light the immorality of the war of aggression. And surely there is promise of a better day, when we realize that in this tragic hour, plans are being formulated for a Society of Nations, with judicial power to crush at its beginning any war of aggression and punish the aggressor.

But this Society of Nations can guarantee peace only on one condition, that no injustice be countenanced in respect to any member nation in the Society. Reparation should be made for war damage. Governments or peoples to whom responsibility for the war is attributed will have to undergo a period of restricted national life for a time. Temporary security measures will be necessary.

Nevertheless these people must be assured that if they do their part in the work of reconstruction, they will in time be received into the Society of Nations, sharing equally with others in rights and responsibilities.

It would be unwise to deny them this hope. It would only bar the way to the freedom of mankind. It would destroy the hope of a better world, built on the community of all nations, determined to preserve true peace.

We believe that men have learned in the school of suffering to respect the rights of all nations, while insisting on their own security against any future aggression.

Questions

- What truth must the leaders of democracy keep in mind?
- On what does future peace depend?
- How will this truth affect the Society of Nations?
- What is the immediate duty imposed upon all?
- What should be the determination of men of good will, the world over?
- Why should this generation be interested in abolishing war?
- What power should the Society of Nations enjoy?

How should that power be able to act?

What has been the Pope's attitude toward war?

What has the progress of man's inventions actually done for mankind?

What shows the immorality of the war of aggression?

What gives us promise of a better day for the world at war?

What one condition is necessary for a Society of Nations to maintain peace?

What temporary measures seem necessary for those responsible for this war?

What hope should be held out to them?

LESSON VI

(Paragraphs 69-92)

Public opinion may not be ready to face this truth at present. For the darkness of hatred blankets the world today, in which peoples are engaged in a bitter global war. But light will come. And in that light both sides will see that there is but one way out of the chaos into which war and hate have plunged the world, and that is by a real recognition of HUMAN SOLIDARITY. This solidarity is not partial but universal. It includes all peoples.

Individuals who have committed crimes against the common law of civilized nations, deserve just punishment. But justice does not call for the punishment of whole communities.

In the tortured hearts of people today is the growing conviction that they must take the reins of destiny into their own hands with more independence than formerly. In this they see a means of stopping violence and aggression.

No longer are men foolish enough to deny that moral principles and the teachings of Christ should guide the lives of States and peoples. These war years have taught everybody that to disdain these teachings as unrealities has resulted in the grim realities; brutality, destruction, annihilation.

If the future is to belong to democracy, the religion of Christ and the teaching of His Church must be heeded. The Church is commissioned by Christ to continue His teaching and to save men. She shows men how to live their lives according to God's order of beings and purposes, and gives them the strength, divine grace, to do so. And this order is the foundation of every democracy. The Church is an ever-living reminder of that divine order. In fighting for her liberty against aggression in every age, she has fought for the liberty of man.

To the world looking for more perfect forms of democracy, the Church announces the most important, most needed message; the dignity of man, the call to all men to be sons of God. It is the call that sounds from the crib of Bethlehem to the farthest parts of earth at a time when that dignity is tragically low. The story of Christmas proclaims

this dignity as nothing else can. It is the supreme Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Christmas when heaven touched earth, and we marvel at the "goodness and kindness of God our Saviour," should make us alive to the intimate unity that God has established among men. The birth of our Saviour, the Restorer of human dignity in all its fullness, reminds us of the need of unity among all men of good will. In Him love will replace hatred, harmony will replace selfish discord, peace will banish war.

We take this occasion to thank the States, Governments, Bishops and people whose generosity has enabled Us to give a helping hand to the suffering people all over the world.

In the first place it is right to pay tribute to the relief work done by the United States of America, and by His Excellency the personal representative of the President, for Italy in particular. We wish to pay a like tribute of gratitude to the Head of the State, the Government and the people of Spain, and other countries for their charity extended to all peoples through Our hands. When this day of hate, suffering and enmity will have become a tragic memory, the good effects of this spirit of charity during these dark days will prove a power for greater good. To all who have shared in this crusade of charity We give our apostolic blessing, and assure them that from anguished hearts the world over there goes to heaven for them the prayer of gratitude: "Deign to reward with eternal life, O Lord, all those who do good to us for Your Name's sake."

Questions

Why is not public opinion ready to hold this hope today?
There is but one way out of the chaos into which the world
has been cast. Explain.

What does justice demand toward those individuals who have
violated the law of civilized nations?

The Pope calls for the acknowledgment of human solidarity.
Explain.

Why do people call for a greater share in government today?
What has resulted from ignoring Christ's teachings as un-
realities?

What part must religion and the Church play in the future of
democracy?

What is the foundation of every democracy?
Of what is the Church an ever-living reminder?

In always fighting for her own liberty, what has the Church
accomplished?

What does the Church proclaim to the world looking for a
true democracy?

Where do we find the supreme declaration of the rights of man?
What should Christmas make us aware of?

How does the Pope conclude his Christmas message?

COMMENTS FROM THE PRESS

DAVID LAWRENCE, *New York Sun*:

This world of tragedy has few voices still sufficiently powerful to make themselves heard above the din of battle and one of them is the voice of Pope Pius XII.

The Pope's message broadcast to the world for Christmas was this year much less a message of religion and much more an essay on political science but running through it was a blending of both in such a stirring way that if the peoples of all the world could really learn and understand the background of that appeal it might be said with confidence that the process of making a permanent peace had really begun.

For irrespective of sect or creed, irrespective of political party or economic class, the Pope's words strike deeply at prejudice, at selfishness, at brutality, at the passions and hates of peoples as well as individuals which sow the seeds of a perennial friction that generates horrible wars.

The Pope is truly one of the great statesmen of our times. His constituency is not merely the Catholics of the world but all persons who have begun to see that disregard of the lessons and teachings of Jesus have brought mankind to the brink of chaos.

The Pope doesn't need to think of third terms or fourth terms or parliamentary majorities or the curve of personal popularity or the prides of position which cause our spokesmen of the public interest to be afraid to take criticism, afraid to admit mistakes, afraid to do right but give lip service to the basic principles of Christianity because at heart they are more interested in applause than sacrifice or martyrdom in a great cause.

So of all the men who speak to big audiences nowadays, the Pope's words carry a message of truth and sincerity. The words of Prime ministers and Presidents are unfortunately construed as the words of political expediency.

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The Baltimore Sun:

The message has a particular significance for American people since the Holy Father addressed himself in part to the special difficulty which has confused Americans, as a nation, from the beginning of their history. That problem, we take it, has to do with duties of citizens in a free society and, conversely, with responsibilities and limitations of the state, or government.

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Washington Daily News:

World statesmen can profit by a study of the Pope's Christmas message. It is a rare combination of spiritual aspiration and realistic insight into the problems of state and world peace.

RAYMOND MOLEY:

The Christmas pronouncement of Pope Pius XII may well prove to be the most important definition of political principle to come out of this long war. Unlike the expressions of the foremost statesmen of this war or even those of Wilson in the last war, the Pope's statement cuts through the generalities of freedom, self-determination and democracy to the precise and vital meaning of these phrases. It is an essay on meaning and substance, rather than a restatement of wordy aspiration.

Closely compared with the Pope's 1939 message, it shows the ripening of his thought after his five years as a witness of world disintegration. In that year which now seems so long ago, the Pope stressed, as conditions of a just and honorable peace, the independence of small as well as large nations, the "progressive disarmament" of all nations, the establishment of a juridical institution to adjust disputes and the rights of all nations, populations and radical minorities. . . .

If anything can save the peace to come from these dangers ahead in what the Pope calls "the vast and thorny ground of foreign relations," this Christmas message will do so. And it can provide a means of reminding Americans of the forgotten individual for whom our state was made.

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Washington Post:

There are two immensely significant elements in the Pope's message. One is his explicit condemnation of dictatorship. The other is his implicit endorsement of democracy. He did not, of course, go so far as to make this endorsement absolute and universal. Rather he reiterated the traditional Catholic idea that the content of government is much more important than form, and on this he quoted his predecessor, Leo XIII.

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Washington Star:

Pope Pius XII has issued a message to mankind that should rank as one of the outstanding utterances of our epoch. Standing far "above the battle," the Pontiff deals with underlying realities and enunciates basic principles on which a constructive world order can be established.

Immensely significant is his conviction that the cornerstone of a new and better world structure must be democracy, both within and between nations and peoples.